

How Children Decode Visual Narrative in Gaiman's and McKean's *The Wolves in the Walls*

Chrysogonus Siddha Malilang¹

English Literature, Universidad de Macao

ABSTRAK

Bagaimana Anak Mengkode-ulang Narasi Visual dalam *The Wolves in the Walls* karya Gaiman dan McKean. Buku cerita bergambar sebagai teks untuk anak-anak merupakan kombinasi unik dari kata-kata dan gambar. Dua elemen yang saling terkait sama lain menciptakan inter-animasi bersama dalam membangun makna. Para ahli telah lama mempercayai bahwa proses membaca buku cerita bergambar melibatkan proses yang rumit dalam lingkaran hermeneutik. Namun, karena buku cerita bergambar terutama ditujukan untuk anak-anak, maka proses tersebut terjadi dalam pikiran sadar mereka. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkapkan proses pembuatan makna anak dalam narasi visual buku cerita bergambar yang mana dalam penelitian ini menggunakan karya Gaiman, *The Wolves in the Walls*. Setelah melalui serangkaian penelitian kualitatif dengan lima anak di Inggris, aspek yang diteliti dalam penelitian ini adalah gaya bercerita, penggambaran pengalaman, dan tempat. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa anak-anak membaca buku cerita bergambar dengan cara yang berbeda dari orang dewasa, terutama dalam strategi yang digunakan untuk membaca teks yang panjang dan rumit.

Kata kunci: cerita bergambar, gaya bercerita, penggambaran pengalaman, tempat, lingkaran hermeneutik

ABSTRACT

Picturebook as a text for children is a unique combination of words and images. Those two elements are interrelated into one another, creating a mutual interanimation in constructing the meaning. Experts have long believed that the process of reading picturebook involves a complicated process of hermeneutic circle. However, since picturebook is mainly aimed for children, the process happens subconsciously within their mind. Therefore, this research aims to reveal children's meaning making process in visual narrative of picturebook, in this research is Gaiman's *The Wolves in the Walls*. After a series of qualitative research with five children in UK, the aspects to research are style, projection of experience, and setting. The result shows that children read the picturebook in a different way than adult, alongside their strategy to cope with long and complicated text.

Keywords: picturebook, style, projection of experience, setting, hermeneutic circle

Introduction

The picturebook is a meeting place, a point of intersection. It marks a spot where word and image, adult and child, author and reader [...] come into limited correspondence with each other. As a juncture of arrivals and departures, the picturebook mimes the indeterminate, ephemeral condition of childhood (Beeck, 2003: 9).

Beeck's definition above has challenged the common belief regarding picturebook in Indonesia. In fact, the books commonly referred to as picturebook in Indonesia is actually an illustrated book. Different with picturebooks, illustrated books do not depend on the collaboration of words and pictures in the meaning making process (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001). Therefore, Beeck's concept of picturebook in itself implies

a complicated combination of various elements, positioning it as not a mere childish entertainment.

Despite targeting children as its target readers, picturebooks also allow adults to find pleasure from different angle and depth. This phenomena is referred to as 'dual audience' (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001), a condition where two different levels of audience are able to enjoy different aspects of it. This dual audience happens due to the way of picturebook speaking to us in a childlike way, but at the same time also combines the sophistication addressing more mature readers (Nodelman, 1988). The childlike mean of conveying the message appeals to the children, while some other sophisticated elements appeal to the mature readers. However, Arizpe and Styles (2003) found that children should not be singled out from the complication in the picturebook, due to the

¹ Alamat korespondensi: English Literature, Universidad De Macao. E-mail: chrys-lyonheart@yahoo.com.

demonstration of their ability to make sense of complex image in literal, moral, aesthetics, visual, and metaphorical level.

Revisiting Beeck's definition, we will find that her first emphasis was on the meeting of words and images. This collaboration constitutes a very important part in defining picturebooks. The different natures of the two –words as the device telling the event (*diegetic*) and pictures as the device showing the events (*mimetic*)– forms a cyclical process of meaning making, referred to as hermeneutic circle (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2011). Hermeneutic circle is explained as the condition in which one element will create an expectation for the others in the meaning making process.

Although pictures seem dominating in picturebook –as well as arousing readers' interest, they are only able to portray condition within one timeframe without limiting the focus. In a way, the limitless imagery is good as it instils bigger imagination. However, a focus is still important in delivering the narrative continuity. And this is where the texts play their role, providing focus to the story and allowing readers to grasp the important bits (Nodelman, 1988). This harmony is referred to by Lewis (2001) as ecology of text, alluding to the biological concept of interdependency in the nature. Similar to plants and animals in biological ecology, two levels –text and pictures– in picturebooks create a mutual interanimation in composing a bigger picture, in this case the picturebooks.

With the unique harmony of pictures and texts in the picturebooks, Nodelman (1988) started the analysis using semiotic approach to it. He created a parallel between words –images and Saussurean concept of signifier– signified. However, unlike the pure concept which puts things as signified and words as signifier, Nodelman treated both elements interchangeably within Saussurean framework. The implication of hermeneutic circle within picturebooks causes both elements to occupy the position of signifier and signified simultaneously. However, since the concept of hermeneutic circle came later in 2001, Nodelman suggested a concept of a gap between the words and pictures, creating an asymmetrical relationship. The existence of gap between these two elements becomes an important distinctive characteristic of picturebook, distinguishing it

from an illustrated book. Arizpe and Styles (2003: 22) has summarised this distinction by saying, “[P]icturebooks composed of pictures and words whose intimate interpretation creates layers of meaning, open to different interpretations and which have the potential to arouse their readers to reflect on the act of reading itself”.

Driven by unique harmony of pictures and words in meaning making within picturebook, children's response to the visual part of it becomes an interesting thing to investigate. In what ways are the images facilitate readers to understand the narrative progression? How do the readers response to the visual details along the story? To assist this study, a book titled *The Wolves in the Wall* by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean is used. Thus, this study aims to answer the question: How do children response to the visual narrative in *The Wolves in the Wall* by picking up the visual elements?

Structuring Picturebook

Just like other texts, this picturebook as a text needs to have a structure. Thus, there must be a special rule structuring the narration through the sequence of image. As the main focus of this study is the response of visual narrative in a book, therefore Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996) 'grammar of visual design' is of particular relevance. They attempted to seek rules of sequencing images to form the narrative plot, thus transcribing the visual design into language. The resulted rules cover style, colour palette, framing, and iconotext.

The style is one of the basic aspects in constructing a picturebook. It is summarised by Nodelman (1988) as “all the aspects of a work of art considered together” (p.77). An analysis of style is important, due to different effect of different style to the reader. A recognisable style from other era or culture may be used as reference to denote the setting (Sipe, 2001). For example, American folk style art might be used in American Indian story to strengthen the feeling of the setting. Most readers will use their background knowledge to perceive this intertextuality. However, children with more limited knowledge to the particular style are still able to relate the setting because of their competence in reading the artistic style (Styles, 1996). With this concept, children will be able to understand the concept of changing

setting with the shifting or combined style in the same book.

The drawing style in most picturebooks also involves the colour in establishing the setting and tone. This element is first and foremost drawing children's attention to the pictures, as suggested by Parson's favouritism, the stage of children responding to art (1987, in Arizpe & Styles, 2003). To appeal more to children, Sipe (2001) found that most artists do not employ the naturalistic rendering of the object, but choose the colour based on the emotional effects to the reader. This unnatural colouring is done to help building the tension in the narrative on the way to climax. Nodelman (1988) noted that the colour palette influences the generation of mood and emotions. It is related to the nature of colour as metafictional device in helping the reader recalling the experience or object of the same colour they saw before. The memory then serves as the background knowledge to understand the image, thus generating the mood and setting of the pictures (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001).

Another important aspect in picturebook design is framing technique. It creates both the sense of involvement and detachment for the reader (Nodelman, 1988). A borderless spread will create a sense of invitation for the reader to get involved more and sympathize with the character. *Full bleed*, a term defining the illustration which extends to the edge of the page on all four sides, suggests that the reader will be a participant, not just a mere spectator of the story (Sipe, 2001). However, the border outside tend to create a sense of detachment. The detachment is caused by the line around the spread which will create an impression of illusion and the realization of existence in the book, therefore the sense of detachment arises. Without the border, the illusions of existence outside the book are amplified and merge into the world of the reader.

The zooming and positioning of the object within the frame is also important in determining the involvement degree with the characters. In this matter, Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) classified the social distance created by zooming and positioning. The closer the zooming, the closer the distance and intimacy it creates. For example, the close-up in the spread will invite the reader to observe the detail more carefully and empathize with the

character. Thus, the level of intimacy is higher and the sense of distance is lower. A similar approach is also proposed by Nodelman (1988) by borrowing the analysis from a film study about shot and panning. The depiction of a whole background is called *establishing shot* to portray the setting. The shot is then followed by the nearer pan shot to give chance for the reader in focusing on smaller details. This technique facilitates the reader in orienting the setting and has a closer intimacy with the characters.

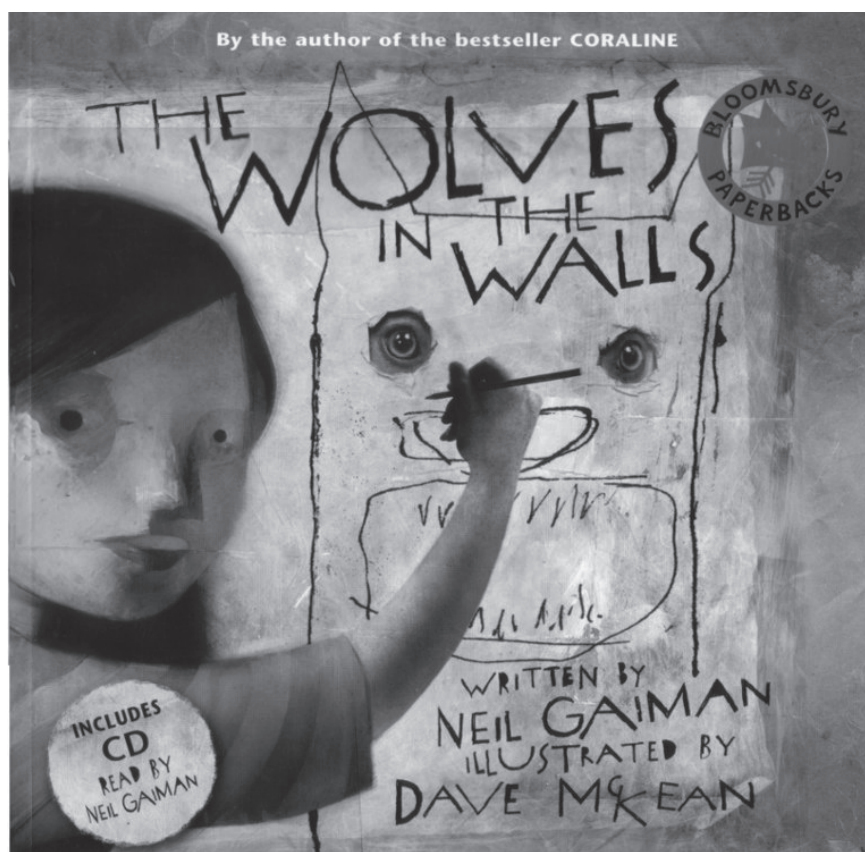
Arizpe & Styles (2003) revealed that the reading process is usually started by the noticing the largest identifiable object. The reader then undergoes a deduction process in understanding the picture. During this deduction process, the reader will employ the metacognitive device by taking hint from the colour, style, framing, and other visual clues. The deduction process results in a tentative hypothesis to be confirmed or denied by the text. The existence of an intraiconic text will start over the deduction process, as elaborated in the hermeneutic circle (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001). This process, however, is not complete yet, as there will be an information gap that readers should fill it with their *schemata* through metacognitive recognition such as intertextuality.

The information gap is also a powerful tool to utilize by the author to stimulate curiosity. The curiosity should be filled by the opening of the next page of page turn (Sipe, 2001). It might be in a form of incomplete action or incomplete detail that cannot be found within visual and verbal detail of that spread, but is expected to be found in the next one. It is then, the progressive narrative device.

Analyzing *The Wolves in the Walls*

The Wolves in the Walls is a rich picturebook in terms of design and metaphors. The book is developed based on the premise of 'a boy who cried wolf'. Lucy, the protagonist, hears the sound of wolves from the walls and tries to warn her family. But they do not believe it until the wolves really drive them out of house. Lucy then tries to take the house back. The richness of the visual domain makes it fit for this study about visual narrative.

The book combines three different styles. The first one is the computer generated image which dominates the whole book. The second one is the



The cover of *The Wolves in the Walls* (Photo: Amazon, 2012)

still photographs used several times to denote some inanimate objects. The third one is the sketch style mainly to portray the wolves and several events. These rich visual feats have been presented altogether in the cover, which shows Lucy draws a wolf in sketch style. The character of Lucy herself is depicted in the computer generated image style. However, the eyes of the drawn wolf are depicted as photograph. This cover already gives a hint of three different styles included in the book.

The computer generated image mainly dominates the whole book, as almost all the characters, save the wolves, are drawn in this manner. Opening the first spread of the book, the computer generated image style welcomes the reader with the depiction of Lucy in the centre with the corridor of the house. The domination of sharp edges in the picture and collage like style somehow remind some adult readers with the cubism style of Picasso. Although it is drawn in a cubism-like manner, the sense of empathy is developed through the close up shot and *full bleed* presentation. In most cases, the full bleed employs close-up shot to Lucy's face, creating a near social distance and invites the reader to identify with

Lucy. Some colour palettes can be interpreted as bleak, although the expressionist style may not suggest so. Therefore, it is subject to personal interpretation.

The typology of the words in this book creates a system of iconotext, in which it integrates into the images to create a special tension. The lay outing of the text is arranged in a way that it emulates the different frequency and volume of text. Some words are arranged ascending and some are arranged descending. The different font size presented here in the image also contributes in creating special sense of changing loudness and sound volume.

All these elements are arranged in a way that the mood constantly shifts, thus builds the tension. Adult readers who are experienced in watching horror movie might be familiar with this style. The use of colour for mood and setting generation is combined with iconotext to represent voices, important element in horror story. The impression resulted from this arrangement also serves as the pageturner. The framing is used to vary narrative pace.

Research Methodology

The qualitative approach is employed in this study because of its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding on social phenomenon from the perspective of human participants in the study (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1999). The research itself deals with the spontaneous responses from the children, indicating the limited control of the researcher over the events. Therefore, Yin's (1998) concept of case study as the technique used to research on the event in which the behaviour cannot be manipulated is the answer. The similar study conducted by Arizpe and Styles (2003) and Evans (2008) also employed case study. The technique allows an in-depth investigation over a case, providing the reason and insight over the phenomenon. However, result from this kind of study cannot be generalized due to the complexity of human being and unclear boundary between phenomenon and context (Yin, 1998).

The research used two unique sources in case study, direct observation and interviews with the participants following Yin's framework (1998). The direct observation was done while reading the book together with the children. Field note was employed as one of the instruments to ensure the validity, reliability, and objectivity of the observation.

A systematic analysis of the book was made prior to the field study. Most of the visual elements significant in constructing the narrative were identified, such as the varied styles, colour palette, iconotext, and framing. Those elements became the framework in developing an interview checklist. The checklist was employed to keep the focus of the interview.

The interview was done with semi-structured technique, considering the possibility of unexpected response and unanticipated reaction. It was done in groups to emulate the condition of normal conversation, thus not putting any pressure to the children. Another reason was the interactivity point, so they can discuss and elaborate the issue better by commenting on friend's response. In that case, the researcher only gave encouraging remarks or fillers. The whole process of interview was audio recorded to make sure no small details were missed.

Five children were participating in this research. They were divided into two groups. The first group consists of Matt, Caleb, and Gina. Matt and Caleb are six years old, while Gina is five. In the second group, both Kelly and Tim are five years old. All of them are students in a community school in Cambridge, UK, and the interviews were done in school.

As the participants' consent is considered, the class teacher was approached in the initial stage. After the approval was given, the consent letter was sent to the head teacher. Within the letter, the explanation of the research and the interview was presented. During the interview itself, the children were informed that they may terminate the process at any convenient time. All the names of the children have been anonymised in reporting. When the research is complete, the brief report summarising the finding shall be sent to the class teacher.

Investigation process

The first interview went without any significant problem. All of the children were fully engaged and even offered to read the book in turn. The interview was not done in a specific time after the reading was finished, but some parts were even done during the reading process. The recording started from the beginning of the reading process, thus recording every single reaction.

In order to verify and triangulate the findings, the additional pair was used, Kelly and Tim. However, the engagement level of the second pair was lower than the first one. Kelly even indicated that the story was too long and left three times to the toilet. Meanwhile, Tim was too quiet in giving the response. Therefore, the result gotten from the second interview was not as rich as the first one.

Analysis of the Findings

As all the data had been gathered, the transcripts, field notes, and drawings were analysed for the response of the visual narrative. The similarities and differences between the interviews were noted and triangulated with the library study's result. The analysis is then divided into several categories, namely response to style, projection of experience, and setting.



First opening of the book (Photo: Amazon, 2012)

Style

With the book being drawn in an expressionist-cubism style, the first impression that children got was the unreal ambience over the picture. The following excerpt was the initial response to the first opening.

- C : Lucy walked around the house
Kelly : LOOK, there she is! [pointing at the picture]
C : Hmm... Any other interesting thing?
Kelly : It looks like.. it looks like a real girl.

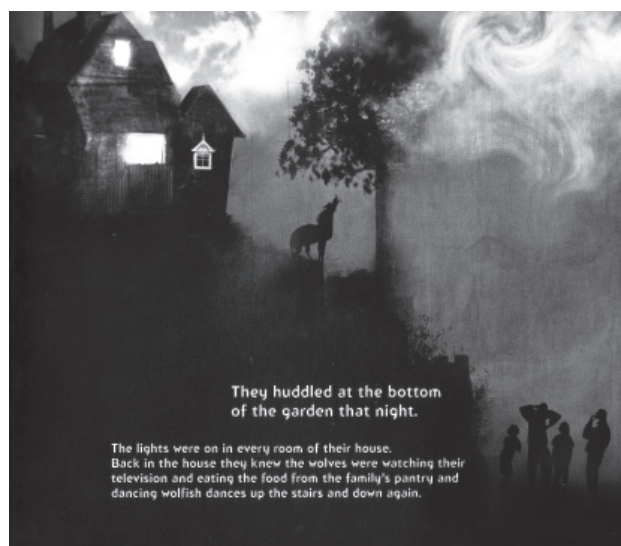
From Kelly's response, we can infer that she saw the picture as something unreal. It is possible that she mistook Lucy's image as non-human in the first attempt due to the absence of face and the cubism style. Therefore, when she finally recognized Lucy, Kelly showed enthusiasm as if she was just solving a puzzle. This act supports Styles' (1996) finding that children are unworried by surrealist imageries. Within that frame of style, the clues to decode the meaning were in form of the smaller detail, just as demonstrated in children's response to the whole picture in the first opening.

- C : What do you think of Lucy's house?
Caleb: It's... It's an old house.....
C : How do you know?
Gina : Dust....
C : Huh? Dust?
Gina : Yes... Dust! There [pointing]. Do you see the dust? There... Near the stairs.

The attention to the smaller details was demonstrated by Gina's response and focus on the stairs rather than the any of the larger design features in the picture. She pointed at the blurry line along the depiction of stair and came into conclusion that the dust was there. Shading was indeed present in the colour of that part of the wall near the stair. The shading was then perceived as the dust because of its darker colour. A plausible explanation for this is that Gina saw that picture in a mimetic style, depicting the condition of the room as it is. Therefore, she might not consider the lighting effect and the colour gradation in the picture and take a mimetic approach to decode. Within the mimetic decoding, she tried to make sense the gradation and created dust as the result.

Probing from this unexpected response, the question was then rephrased into asking about the temperature of the room. This question was supposedly probing the children into interpreting the colour palette in the spread. Yet, Matt said confidently that the room is cold. His justification of the answer includes the non-portrayed refrigerator in the kitchen. He mentioned that Lucy is heading to the kitchen, and there must be a refrigerator in the kitchen. Additionally, he explained that the door in the picture leads to the kitchen. However, careful observation later on made me notice the white colour in the door where Lucy is heading to. Since white colour is often associated with cold, this might also be the trigger that caused Matt to say that the room is cold. From this association, he might recall refrigerators, also due to the fact that most refrigerators' doors are often white, thus creating a new layout for the house, explaining the existence of kitchen as the plausible link between cold and white in the house. This response, however, shows how much he engaged with the story, a strategy of owning the story by creating the complex setting of room arrangement.

Attention to the small detail on the same picture also occurred in the second interview. Kelly did not express an opinion on the temperature or the colour palette. She focused instead to the pattern of the carpet by repeatedly saying that it is nicely patterned. The plain coloured wall and the absence of the furniture in the pictured room may cause the attention diversion to the carpet. Once she found the existence of the pattern, it became her focal point in the picture.



The one of content Illustration of McKean's *The Wolves in the Walls* (Photo: Amazon, 2012)

The colour pattern seems to occupy also a special place for children's response towards the images. In another case, the focus of colour pattern even strengthens the fact that children pay attention to smaller details first. The bigger detail such as the colour impression to convey the mood was not given the attention in the first place. This case was found when Caleb responded to a spread when Lucy felt very afraid of the wolves. The pale brown palette was used here, with Lucy's gaze demanding attention from the reader, as it is a close-up shot of her facial expression. The predominant colour, however, seem to be ignored by Caleb. Instead, he turned his focus to the red stripes on Lucy's T-Shirt. The focus on red colour might be associated with the fact that red is his favourite colour. When I asked him about the other colours, he pointed at the white stripes and happily screamed because he found a pattern.

From all points presented above, it can be argued that the style creates a gap in the representation of this pictorial world due to the lack of realism. The lack of realism then arguably triggers various meaning-making strategies to bring the children closer to their own sense of reality. However, all the meaning-making strategies result from the attention to the smaller detail in this picture. From the details, an inductive process appears to be used to formulate meaning to the picture, thus children appear more focused on local details compared to adults who see the whole impression in the first place.

Setting

The setting construction, as a part of visual narrative, also goes through the same inductive process of meaning-making. Both interviews successfully address this matter and get an insight over the construction process. The spread exemplifying this best is the one where the family is forced to leave the house by the wolves' invasion. The setting of time was clearly expressed here by the children, but the small details served as the clues for them.

Caleb: There are people... shadow of people....
They look like the family. This one is Lucy...

Matt : There's the tornado! Look! Look!

Caleb: This looks like the father....

C : When do you think this picture take place?

Gina : At night. See... There's the light

Caleb: It's almost morning

Matt : Almost morning! There is the tornado!
Tornado in the cloud means almost morning!

Caleb: And.... and its... it's blue. The sky is blue....

Matt : Blue and tornado... It's almost morning.....

The excerpt above was taken from the first interview where the children were more engaged. Responses were given prior to the reading of text. We can see that the comprehension of the time setting departs from the small details and then goes to the whole composition by looking at the predominant colour. We can see that the first clue of a nighttime is the light from the house. Gina assumes that the lamp is on during the dark time, thus providing a hint of a night time. This conclusion might be inferred from the clue she picked in the previous three spreads, where 'night' was clearly stated. From the small detail of the light, Matt went to the image of the clouds and concluded that it is dawn. From the cloud, children's attention was moved to the background featuring blue colour. It is a light blue, not dark blue that suggests a midnight. Adult reader might interpret that as the effect from the moonlight. However, children may indicate that as 'not a nighttime'. The shadowy figures of the people,



The other Illustration of McKean's *The Wolves in the Walls* (Photo: Amazon, 2012)

wolf, and the house were noticed as the absence of the sun. Therefore, they came to the conclusion of dawn time. A compromising strategy to accommodate both Matt's and Gina's inference is arguably employed here.

We can see that the setting construction also starts from the small details. The combination of the smaller details then formed into a bigger picture and bigger understanding. The decoding process demonstrated in the excerpt above must have been a strategy for children, trying very hard to make sense. However, there is a possibility that the process happened because the children are trying to give the expected answer to my question, thus they engaged in such a process.

Projection of Experience

The projection of experience initially was not the main focus of the essay. However, as the research went on, the emerging data of the projection became influential in children's process of interpreting the image. Bromley explains this by stating that children related some elements of the text with what's in their memory (1996). Margaret Meek, quoted by Bromley (1996), mentioned that this process thus gives the text a different meaning and a unique explanation of certain phenomenon for each of the reader, considering their unique past experience and background knowledge. One example of this projection comes in the following discussion. The question was initially intended to help revealing children's response towards the colour palette in determining the mood. However,

the response to the mood was strengthened by another reference. The response towards the colour itself did not even appear.

C : What do you think about this picture?

Kelly : She is quite scared.

C : How do you know that she's scared?

Kelly : Because she's is also worrying in mat.

Tim : And she only has one tooth!!

Kelly : Yes, she's one tooth. Maybe she lost all her teeth and one tooth is there.

Tim : I lost my tooth yesterday

We can see above that Tim brought the notion of losing the teeth and related it to Kelly's response to feeling scared. The clue about this tooth came when he saw the shade in Lucy's lips. The picture is drawn in an expressionist way and does not resemble real thing, thus leaving a huge gap to fill in the meaning making process. This gap corresponds to Caleb's sense of association in recalling his experience and making reference to losing teeth. The spread itself is strongly influencing readers to intimately engage with Lucy. The character is portrayed in a close up angle, indicating a very close social distance. Her eyes are staring at the reader, demanding attention and identification (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Once the readers identify themselves with the character, the recollection phase will begin. According to Clark (1986, in Arizpe & Styles, 2003), recollection phase is where the brain integrates the new knowledge with what readers already know, creating an intersection between the painting and the memories of personal experience.

Another interesting point that I found during this research is the vast imagination of children can serve as the pool of various interpretations and stories drawing from their past experience. The supporting data for this argument is found as the children demonstrated the ability to interpret abstract image and create a narrative behind it through the association of their previous knowledge.

In the first group, when the children reached the spread where the wolf is depicted as playing video games, the illustrator filled the TV ser with colour collage just like an abstract picture. However, Matt came up to me and drew attention to the

TV. He then said that it was a shooting game. The scattering colours are understood as the explosion, "... that's why it's like this!" said Matt. For him, every single aspect, every single fragment of the image should be meaningful and has a story behind it. As Nikolajeva & Scott (2001: 228) mentioned that 'intertextuality presupposes the reader's active participation in the decoding process', we can safely assume Matt's previous engagement with such kind of game, as game can also be considered as text. Furthermore, he mentioned that the red coloured block within the TV reminded him of fire. With the clue from the book saying that it is a game, he found the explosion as the link between those two. From the small scene reconstructed on his mind, the explanation of the video game came into existence.

Intertextual reference, as a part of past experience association, also played an important role for the children to understand the multi-layered image style. In the spread where Lucy dreams about her pig puppet, Matt eagerly moved towards that spread, not paying attention to the verso of that opening. He pointed at the illustration of the wolves trying to eat the pig puppet.

Matt : It's a... it's *Nightmare before Christmas*. It looks like *Nightmare before Christmas*.....

R : Really? So, what do you think is happening here?

Matt : It's *Nightmare before Christmas*. I love that movie. WOOF! (imitating monster's walk) It's *Nightmare before Christmas*. So.... So this is.... it's like... this is a nightmare!

An interesting thing here is Matt's deduction about nightmare happened before we read the words in that spread. Without reading the explanation and story of the pictures, he tried decoding the image through a reference to his favorite movie. Surprisingly, a careful look on the multi-styled picture, the one referred as *Nightmare before Christmas* by Matt indicates character's imagination. His inference shows the construction of understanding through the use of intertextual reference. He didn't utilize the clues in previous spreads about the meaning, but nevertheless came in the same understanding.

The intertextual reference to *Nightmare before Christmas* is also interfering with the prediction of the next event. Matt, taking the reference from the cruelty and devilish nature of creatures in *Nightmare before Christmas*, predicted that the wolves will rip the pig puppet. He quickly went up and imitated the ripping gesture. Interestingly, there is no clue in the picture that the creature will rip the pig puppet. Therefore, this prediction came merely from his understanding of visual similarity with the shadow play of claws in the movie's prelude. A case of *vraisemblance*, the anticipation and identification of what one expected to find in a plot (Culler, 1975 in Wilkie-Stibb, 2005), can be seen here. An interesting point is that occurrence of this *vraisemblance* was triggered by the similarity in style, not because the similarity in plot. Both stories share the same genre, but the basic premises are different. The book is about running away from home, while the movie is about stealing Christmas. Therefore, it raises the assumption that all storylines can be connected one another, provided slight similarity to the reference before blending two or more completely different stories.

All of these instances prove that the narrative construction in the image of picturebook cannot be separated from the intertextual reference. The arbitrary referential relationship between signifier and signified leaves gaps between images and meaning. The gap was then filled with reader's previous knowledge –experience, emotion, or discourse– in the attempt of bringing sense and predict the meaning (Goodwin, 2009). In relation to this, Hughes also argued that 'very young reader enjoys seeing a world which is highly recognisable' (1996: 74). Therefore, the children tried to put their previous knowledge into the story and making it their own.

Conclusion

The result of this study shows that children aged 5-6 years tend to pay more attention to the small details in the image. The focus on these small details became important for them as the meaning-making was done in an inductive process, going from the small things to a broader scope. They tend to find an interesting, familiar, and expected details in their sense first (Arizpe & Style, 2003).

These things then become a basis for them to develop the narrative and own explanation. This familiarity and sense of involvement with the details enable them to anticipate and predict the plot through the existence of *vraisemblance* (Culler, 1975 in Wilkie-Stibb, 2005) or their own personal experience (Bromley, 1996).

The inclusion of the familiar things into the story can also be seen as children's strategy to own the text and thus enable them to engage more. The term of intertextuality here also refers to broader scope of texts/discourses, as the children drew references from movies or discourses around their daily life. Nodelman's (1988) and Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996) theory about colour and mood generation were not successfully verified due to different priority of children within this age range. This does not mean that their theories are wrong, yet they cannot be applied to children at this age. Length of the story also posed a challenge for the children considering their attention span. However, this research managed to reveal various children's strategies to cope with such a complex and challenging text like *The Wolves in The Walls*, including creating a sense of familiarity, being playful with the images, and owning the story by guessing and making up their own version of it. A better result of the research addressing the matter might be achieved with older children, because there is a possibility that their focus and awareness might be different.

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